

EDITORIALS.

AS THE NUMBER of botanists in this country increases it is inevitable that they will cross each other's paths more and more. Up to the present each worker, except in taxonomy, has been more or less independent, and what he has had to say regarding any given subject has been accepted by his fellows, for the time at least, as substantially correct. In taxonomy, however, the number of workers has been greater; their views have conflicted, as from the very nature of the subject, they must; and from the criticisms of each other's work a considerable amount of coldness or even aversion has been engendered. In Germany one sees this condition in its extreme development; scientific men refusing to speak to those who antagonize their views on controverted points, or even absenting themselves from societies whose meetings are attended by the obnoxious opponent.

NO ONE CAN believe that American botanists wish such a state of affairs to exist here. That being so, it will be well for each to exercise caution in the matter of unfavorable criticism which he may be called upon to make upon the work of his associates. It seems clear that not only the right but often the duty to pass such criticism must be maintained. It becomes a question therefore of the manner and the standpoint of criticism. As to manner, it is to be assumed that this will not pass the bounds of courtesy in the future, as it has rarely done in the past. Past sins in this respect have been chiefly in the standpoint of the critic.

WHAT OUGHT this to be? The prime consideration in the criticism should be the assumption that the investigator whose work is disapproved is neither an ignoramus nor an imbecile. Of course either of these states may be proven, but the evidence must be very decisive if others are to believe. Is such an assumption ever possible? Those who attended the Toronto meeting of the British Association had the opportunity of hearing one distinguished mycologist make a charge

against another which could scarcely proceed from any other assumption, so childish was the blunder imputed to him. At the meeting of the American Association also a paper was read by a young man who had studied the carnation disease for one year charging two botanists who had studied this disease for nearly seven years with most egregious error regarding its cause. Other more remote examples will occur to those who are familiar with botanical history. It may be that Magnus was right and Eriksson was wrong; that Woods was right and Arthur and Bolley wrong; we cannot judge; but we wonder at the attitude of mind which assumes so great possibilities of aberration on the part of another, and so few on one's own. Is it not this sort of criticism, which, couched in irreproachable language, proclaims in effect "See what a silly blunder this man has made, and how easily I expose it," the sort that rankles and leads to estrangement? And having done its evil work in one direction, is it not quite likely to return as a boomerang and smite its author, if, perchance, renewed investigation shows him mistaken?

IF WE ARE to avoid quarrels which quickly run through Touchstone's seven causes, we do well to take heed that our attitude does not imply the quip quarrelsome while our words contain only the retort courteous.